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Justice Department lawyer Bruce Ohr, frequently targeted by President Trump, was told Russia had ‘Trump over a barrel’

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AP

Key Points

- Senior Justice Department lawyer Bruce Ohr says that he was told two years ago that Russian intelligence believed it had Donald Trump “over a barrel,” according to multiple people familiar with the encounter.

- Ohr also says he learned that a Trump campaign aide had met with higher-level Russian officials than the aide had acknowledged, the people said.
- The previously unreported details of Ohr's breakfast with former British spy Christopher Steele reveal an exchange of potentially explosive information about Trump between two men the president has relentlessly sought to discredit.



Former associate deputy U.S. attorney general Bruce Ohr arrives to testify behind closed doors before the House Judiciary and House Oversight and Government Reform Committees, August 28, 2018.

Chris Wattie | Reuters

A senior [Justice Department](#) lawyer says a former British spy told him at a breakfast meeting two years ago that Russian intelligence believed it had Donald Trump “over a barrel,” according to multiple people familiar with the encounter.

The lawyer, [Bruce Ohr](#), also says he learned that a [Trump campaign](#) aide had met with higher-level Russian officials than the aide had acknowledged, the people said.

The previously unreported details of the July 30, 2016, breakfast with [Christopher Steele](#), which Ohr described to lawmakers this week in a private interview, reveal an exchange of potentially explosive information about Trump between two men the president has relentlessly sought to discredit.

They add to the public understanding of those pivotal summer months as the [FBI](#) and intelligence community scrambled to untangle possible connections between the Trump campaign and [Russia](#). And they reflect the concern of Steele, a longtime FBI informant whose Democratic-funded research into Trump ties to Russia was compiled into a dossier, that the Republican presidential candidate was possibly compromised and his urgent efforts to convey that anxiety to contacts at the FBI and Justice Department.

The people who discussed Ohr’s interview were not authorized to publicly discuss details of the closed session and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.



and Moscow.

Trump and some of his supporters in Congress have also accused the FBI of launching the entire Russia counterintelligence investigation based on the dossier. But memos authored by Republicans and Democrats and

declassified this year show the probe was triggered by information the U.S. government received earlier about the Russian contacts of then-Trump campaign foreign policy adviser, George Papadopoulos.

The FBI's investigation was already under way by the time it received Steele's dossier, and Ohr was not the original source of information from it.

One of the meetings described to House lawmakers Tuesday was a Washington breakfast attended by Steele, an associate of his and Ohr. Ohr's wife, Nellie, who worked for the political research firm, Fusion GPS, that hired Steele, attended at least part of the breakfast.

Ohr also told Congress that Steele told him that Page, a Trump campaign aide who traveled to Moscow that same month and whose ties to Russia attracted FBI scrutiny, had met with more senior Russian officials than he had acknowledged meeting with.



Ohr said he met in late December 2017 with two senior Justice Department officials, Scott Skoville and James Crowell, who told him they were unhappy he had not proactively disclosed his meetings with Steele. They said he was being stripped of his associate deputy attorney post as part of a planned internal reorganization, people familiar with Ohr's account say.

He met again soon after with one of the officials, who told him Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein did not believe he could continue in his current position as director of a drug grant-distribution program — known as the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force.

Sessions and Rosenstein, Ohr was told, did not want him in the post because it entailed White House meetings and interactions, the people said.

Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores declined to comment.

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